

Invitation to Parents...

What if we were to tell you that there is a strategy you can employ right now to greatly increase the chances of your teenager achieving happiness and success? Is that something you would be interested in hearing?

What does success look like?

Teens who are able to thrive, regardless of their circumstances, have a strong self-concept and strong character; they are responsible, capable, caring, and other-centered.

What are the obstacles to getting there?

Youth culture fails in its messages about the meaning and purpose of life.

- “The clinical observations demonstrate that, when young people find nothing to dedicate themselves to while growing up, it becomes increasingly difficult for them to acquire motivating belief systems later in life. The result is a sense of ‘drift’ that can lead to personal as well as social pathologies.” (“The Development of Purpose During Adolescence,” by Damon, Menon, and Bronk, Stanford University, in *Applied Developmental Science*, 2003)
- Research by the Fixed Point Foundation discovered that the majority of college-age atheists were church youth who embraced their atheism between 14-17 years of age.
- National Study on Youth and Religion (Christian Smith, Notre Dame) discovered that the majority of youth in the church are moral relativists, practical deists, and unable to articulate what they believe.
- More than half of American college students have had suicidal thoughts. (Dr. David Drum, University of Texas, 2006)
- Nearly half of all college students engage in binge drinking. (National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism, niaaa.nih.gov)
- 77% of college students have had sexual intercourse. (University of Minnesota study, 2007)
- 79% of those who leave the Church do so by the age of 23 (Leaving Catholicism, Pew Research, 2011)
- 58% of abortions are performed on women in their 20’s. (American Congress of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, 2011)

Where do you start?

First, it is important to understand the basic needs of your teens:

- 1. The Need to Be Understood:** For the most part, the adults in the lives of teenagers are there to manage them. Few if any are seeking to understand and know the teenagers personally. This is the reason peers and popular culture can have such an influence on them.
- 2. The Need to Belong:** Teens have a great need to experience a welcoming and supportive environment among their peers.
- 3. The Need to Be Transparent:** Teenagers rarely have the opportunity to share their concerns, needs, problems, and hurts because they have not experienced trust and transparency with a small group of friends.
- 4. The Need to Engage Critical Thinking About Faith and Life:** Teenagers are naturally evaluating everything they were raised to believe. They are capable of abstract thinking and are in the “searching” stage of faith development. This is the time to get them to think about what they believe and why. However, they don’t necessarily want to be taught. Rather, they seek dialogue, encouragement, and validation.
- 5. The Need for Guidance:** Adults need to guide teens in building strong relationships with one another. In addition, adults need to guide teenagers in thought-provoking discussion and faith sharing so they can take ownership of their faith and principles.



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How do you meet the basic needs of your teenager?

There are three influencers that help meet these basic needs.

1. Communication and encouragement from parents.
2. A small group of friends committed to one another and to honest sharing.
3. An adult mentor(s) who facilitates the group, establishes trust, and guides faith discussions.

Our parish believes that the most effective way to meet these basic needs of your teenager is small group discipleship.

What is small group discipleship?

- Small groups are environments where teens feel known and loved.
- Discipleship involves a caring adult mentor(s) who leads the small group as teens grow in their relationships with one another and with God. The goal is to develop the habits to become devoted disciples of Jesus Christ, taking ownership of their faith.
- Our parish has subscribed to *YDisciple*, a website that provides the training needed for mentors, dynamic video presentations of the faith, and well-crafted discussion questions that engage critical thinking and dialogue in the small group.

What can you do to get your teenager in a discipleship group?

1. Have a conversation with your teenager about the importance of joining a discipleship group.
2. Ask your teenager about inviting friends (same gender) to be in the group.
3. Have a conversation with the parents of these friends. Share this ***Invitation to Parents*** handout with them and invite them to participate.
4. Have a conversation with your teenager about some possible mentors to lead the group.
5. Share the ***Expectations of a YDisciple Small Group Adult Mentor*** handout with possible mentors and personally invite them to lead the group.
6. Introduce your mentor(s) to the Pastor and/or YDisciple Parish Coordinator so they can be prepared to lead and be given access to YDisciple's platform.
7. Open your home to host the small group gathering and provide snacks.
8. Use your username and password to access the YDisciple content and use the ***Parent Sheets*** to have conversations with your teenager.